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ABSTRACT

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A Comparison of the Effects of Growth Groups in Counselor Education Courses

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ABSTRACT

This study attempted to examine whether growth groups are an effective training technique in counselor education. Two experimental groups which differed in group size and the amount of time devoted to the group experience were compared to a control group. Improved congruence between real and ideal self was found in the students who participated in the smaller and more intensive groups. There were no differences among the groups in measures of ego strength and perceptions of others. Reasons for the limited success of the groups in this and similar studies are discussed.

The increased use of growth groups (e.g., T groups, sensitivity groups, and self-awareness groups) in counselor education has taken place amidst conflicting evidence regarding their value in training counselors. Wirt, Betz, and Engle (1969) found that after 14 sessions of group counseling, counselor education students showed no greater improvement in self concept than did a control group when mean scores of the groups were compared. There was, however, more change within the experimental group than within the control group; that is, the experimental subjects showed changes in self concept in both directions, whereas the control subjects' self concept scores remained relatively static. The results of studies by Reddy (1970) and Myrick and Pare (1971) also failed to demonstrate improvement in self concept as a result of group participation by students of counseling. On the other hand, Burck et al. (1973) reported that after 11 group sessions, students felt more sensitive to others' needs and more adequate in their interpersonal relationships. Burck's students, however, were involved not only in groups but in a variety of other learning experiences, including team teaching, observation of counseling styles and experiential-feedback learning techniques.

Other studies suggest that other traits and behaviors are modifiable through group experience. Reddy (1970) stated that T group participation by students and faculty resulted in improved practicum supervisor-student relationships and increased client regard by student counselors. In another study, (Woody, 1971) after participating in groups, students demonstrated increased deference and decreased exhibition and changed scores on the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule. These students' counseling behaviors also became more like that of their groups' leaders. Whittlesey et al. (1971) reported a decrease in authoritarianism scores for male students of counseling, but not for females, after a semester's course which included weekly T group sessions and an optional full day marathon. In this same study, no changes were found in students' needs as measured by an adjective check list. The students, however, rated the T group as the most valuable part of the course which also included large group theory sessions and large group skill development sessions.

Unfortunately, all of these studies have methodological limitations and, therefore, do not support the inclusion or exclusion of growth groups in counselor education programs. Two studies produced negative results. In one of these, the Wirt, Betz and Engle study, students spent only 14 hours, in one hour sessions, in the group experience. It could be argued that neither the number of sessions nor the length of each session was

enough to produce change. In the Myrick and Pare study the N was so small that large differences would have been necessary to obtain statistical significance.

Of the four studies which yielded wholely or partly positive results, three had no control groups. In the fourth, the Woody study, those changes that did occur--in decreased exhibition, increased deference and imitation of the leader's behavior--were consistent with what one would expect from the psychoanalytic approach that was used with that group. The majority of school counselors, however, do not use Freudian counseling techniques.

Taken together, these studies must be viewed as valuable but limited attempts in exploring the issue of whether group involvement is a useful adjunct to counselor training.

Table 1
Summary of Six Studies of Value of Growth Groups in Counselor Education

Study	N	Total Hours in group	Control Group	Results
Burck et al.	20	22	no	positive
Myrick and Pare	9	22.5	yes	negative
Reddy	6	40	no	positive
Whittlesey et al.	50	38-50	no	partially positive
Wirt, Betz, and Engle	33	14	yes	negative
Woody	20	45	yes	partially positive

The purpose of this study was to explore further the issue of student growth groups in counselor education and, specifically, to determine whether the variables of group size and total time spent in a growth group influence self-concept and perception of others.

Method

Two courses were compared which were similar in content and structure but which differed in the amount of instructional resources. The first course was a six credit summer module that was funded by the Educational Practices Development Act. Forty-eight students were enrolled. The staff consisted of four faculty of professorial rank, two graduate assistants, and a part time multi-media technician. Each student participated in a growth group for two three-hour sessions each week. Each of the professors, all of whom were experienced group leaders, led a group of 12 students. The objectives of the groups were to improve self-concept and interpersonal perception. Students also spent the equivilent of one day a week in the field working with youth in schools and drug programs. They received six hours a week of small group supervision of their field work. They also participated in two, three hour seminars per week which included lectures, demonstrations, and discussions of assigned readings.

The second course was similar to the first, except that it did not have the luxury of grant support and, consequently, no additional faculty

beyond the one professor assigned to the course. The 28 students in this course also participated in two weekly, instructor led, group sessions. The group, consequently, was of the class size of 28 and each session lasted only one and one-half hours. The field experience consisted of working with youth in settings similar to those in the funded course. The students met regularly in small groups in which they discussed their field work and their assigned readings. The study groups were directed by the students themselves. The instructor met with students individually and with small groups when he or the students felt the need to do so.

Thus, the two courses were alike in that students participated in groups and field work and studied the same cognitive material. The courses differed in that the students in the funded program spent twice (six hours per week vs three) as much time in smaller (12 vs 28) growth groups, received formal rather than informal field work supervision from their instructor and studied content in instructor led classes rather than in student groups.

The control group for this study consisted of 26 students who were taking a Mental Health course as part of their requirements for a Master's degree in education. This course was a traditional lecture-discussion course without field work or group work. This course ran concurrently in time with the two experimental courses.

Two instruments were administered on the first and last days of

classes to each of the three groups: The Baron's Ego Strength Scale and the Pervin and Lilly's Self-Concept Semantic Differential. The latter instrument was modified in two ways; first, in addition to comparison between Myself and My Ideal Self, comparisons were made between My Colleagues and Ideal Colleagues, second, The Certainty and Importance Scales of the Self-Concept Semantic Differential were not used. The reason for the change was that it was felt that the group processes would not only effect the congruence of Self-Ideal Self but attitudes towards colleagues and congruence of those attitudes as well. The thirteen Semantic Differential scales were placed on a separate page for each of the four concepts. For purposes of interpretation the scores on the thirteen scales were combined into the three semantic differential factors; Evaluative (sociable - unsociable, good - bad, kind - cruel, unselfish - selfish, wise - foolish), Activity (active - passive, eager - indifferent, rash - cautious, excitable - calm), and Potency strong - weak, free - constrained, severe - lenient, hard - soft).

Results

Table 2 shows the results of pre- and post- tests for ego strength. There were no significant differences for the pre-test or the post-test. Table 3 shows that there were no differences between any of the three groups on

pre- or post-tests on any of the Colleague Scales of the Semantic Differential. Tables 4 and 5 show the amount of change in congruence between perceived self and ideal self and between perceived colleagues and ideal colleagues for the three groups. Since one of the limitations of the chi-square test of significance is that the expected number of cases can not be less than five in more than twenty per-cent of the cells, it was necessary to either eliminate "no change" scores or to combine them with "improved" or "worse" scores. The results are consistent no matter how scores are combined. Increased congruence between perceived self and ideal self is reported on the value scale of the Self Concept Semantic Differential. Of the funded group, 24 had greater, 9 the same, and 11 lower congruence. For the non-funded group, 7 had greater, 2 the same, and 14 lower congruence. Of the regular Mental Health class, 13 had greater, 2 the same, and 5 lower congruence. This difference was significant. Though the funded group consistently produced higher congruent scores than the non-funded group on the Activity and Potency scales comparing Self-Ideal Self and on the Value, Activity, and Potency scales comparing Colleague-Ideal Colleague, none of these differences were statistically significant.

Discussion

Of all the measures tested, only one, congruence in self concept, seemed to be influenced by the EPDA program which was characterized by a low student-teacher ratio and intensive participation in growth groups. The remaining variables were uneffected by the more intensive EPDA procedures.

The paucity of positive results could be due to the inadequacy of the measuring instrument. The internal consistency and reliability of the SCSD Activity scale might be questioned. Rash-Cautious and Excitable-Calm choices did not elicit the same rankings as Active-Passive and Eager-Indifferent. Perhaps these terms are value contaminated; active and eager being good, rash and excitable, bad. Another possible explanation for the limited results is that since the methods used by the funded course's leaders were consistent with phenomenological counseling techniques, it might very well be that the only improvement which should be expected is improved congruence of self image.

Because the non-funded course's instructor was also an experienced group leader who also used the phenomonological approach, the improved congruence of self image is probably attributable to the funded course's smaller group size and the greater amount of time their students spent in their groups. If this is so, and if improved congruence of self image were

an objective of a counselor education program, participation by students in groups would probably be a useful training device; but the size of such groups would have to be limited to the traditional group therapy size of twelve or so and be planned for enough sessions and total time for the effects to be achieved. However, since improved congruence of self image was the only change that occurred -- even the theoretically associated change of improved congruence in perception of real and ideal colleague was not achieved -- the question of the costs and benefits of a group program remain.

The findings of this study, added to the results of previous studies indicate that participation in growth groups by students of counseling produces very limited changes; especially when compared to regular "non-group" classes with warm and capable instructors. There have been enough positive findings, however, to also suggest that in growth groups, we have a new training tool which we have not yet learned to use effectively. Goals of groups may have to be specified behaviorally and more experimentation conducted to determine which group techniques and processes can achieve those goals and whether, in fact, the group methods can achieve the goals better than other less costly methods.

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Table 2

Results of Analysis of Variance for Baron's Ego Strength Scale

Pre-Test

	Experimental	Regular Guidance	Mental Health
N	48	28	26
Mean	47.38	46.39	44.77

Source of Variation	Ss	df	Mean Sq	F
Treatment	114.60	2	57.30	2.01*
Error	2820.55	99	28.49	
Total	2935.15	101		

Post-Test

	Experimental	Regular Guidance	Mental Health
N	46	23	21
Mean	47.26	45.74	43.48

Source of Variation	Ss	df	Mean Sq	F
Treatment	208.45	2	104.22	2.01*
Error	3014.5	87	34.54	
Total	3222.99	89		

*not significant

Table 3

Summary of Results of The Analysis of Variance of the

Colleague Semantic Differential for 90 Graduate Students

Type of Test	F	P
Pretest-Colleague-Value	0.6939	N.S.
Pretest-Colleague-Activity	0.1952	N.S.
Pretest-Colleague-Potency	0.07521	N.S.
Pretest-Ideal Colleague-Value	0.6616	N.S.
Pretest-Ideal Colleague-Activity	0.1883	N.S.
Pretest-Ideal Colleague-Potency	1.5789	N.S.
Post test-Colleague-Value	0.4342	N.S.
Post test-Colleague-Activity	0.1428	N.S.
Post test-Colleague-Potency	0.1239	N.S.
Post test-Ideal Colleague-Value	0.6211	N.S.
Post test-Ideal Colleague-Activity	0.1024	N.S.
Post test-Ideal Colleague-Potency	1.0266	N.S.

Table 4

Results of Chi Square of Semantic Differential Scores for Increased Congruence between Perceived Self and Ideal

Group	Value Improved	Value Same	Value Worse
Funded Course (EPDA)	24	9	11
Non-Funded Course	7	2	14
Mental Health Course	13	2	15

	X^2	P
Improved V Worse X Treatment	8.37	.02
Improved & Same V Worse X Treatment	9.64	.01
Improved V Same & Worse X Treatment	5.68	.10

Group	Activity Improved	Activity Same	Activity Worse
Funded Course (EPDA)	20	10	14
Non-Funded Course	12	1	10
Mental Health Course	13	2	5

	X^2	P
Improved V Worse X Treatment	1.40	N.S.
Improved & Same V Worse X Treatment	2.80	N.S.
Improved V Same & Worse X Treatment	2.80	N.S.

Group	Potency Improved	Potency Same	Potency Worse
Funded Course	27	2	15
Non-Funded Course	9	3	11
Mental Health Course	7	3	10

	X^2	P
Improved V Worse X Treatment	3.57	N.S.
Improved & Same V Worse X Treatment	4.97	N.S.
Improved V Same & Worse X Treatment	5.15	N.S.

Table 5

Results of the Chi Square of the Semantic Differential for Increased Congruence between Perceived Colleagues and Ideal Colleagues

Group	Value Improved	Same	Worse
Funded Course (EPDA)	22	2	20
Non-Funded Course	8	2	12
Mental Health Course	5	4	12

	X^2	P
Improved V [illegible] X Treatment	2.79	N.S.
Improved & Same V Worse X Treatment	0.[illegible]	N.S.
Improved V Same & Worse X Treatment	4.[illegible]4	N.S.

Group	Activity Improved	Same	Worse
Funded Course (EPDA)	26	3	15
Non-Funded Course	10	2	10
Mental Health Course	8	3	8

	X^2	P
Improved V Worse X Treatment	1.41	N.S.
Improved & Same V Worse & Treatment	.91	N.S.
Improved V Same & Worse X Treatment	2.82	N.S.

Group	Potency Improved	Same	Worse
Funded Course (EPDA)	25	3	16
Non-Funded Course	9	2	11
Mental Health Course	8	3	10

	X^2	P
Improved V Worse X Treatment	2.92	N.S.
Improved & Same V Worse X Treatment	1.46	N.S.
Improved V Same & Worse X Treatment	2.64	N.S.